

## EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP THREE HISTORY



Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) Three was commissioned April 17, 2007 in San Diego, Calif.

ESG 3 is an strictly operational command, certifying expeditionary strike group forces for deployment and maintaining proficiencies as a staff to provide fleet commanders with a ready fly-away unit that is extremely flexible.

Prior to its commission, ESG 3 was formerly Amphibious Group (COMPHIBGRU) Three.

COMPHIBGRU Three was changed from Amphibious Group Eastern Pacific Command, October 1, 1984, and then reorganized on August 1, 1986, into three assault squadrons and two non-deploying readiness squadrons.

During Operation DESERT SHIELD, COMPHIBGRU THREE Sailors deployed to direct strategic operations in the Arabian Gulf. Then in December 1990, the command deployed in support of Operation DESERT STORM with a 13-ship Amphibious Task Force, the largest to sail from the West Coast since 1965. The Task Force joined its East Coast counterpart in the north Arabian Sea and formed the largest Amphibious assault force since the Korean conflict - 31 amphibious ships, four combat logistics ships and eight supporting merchant ships. In February 1991, the major amphibious operation of the Gulf War took place as COMPHIBGRU THREE and the Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed more than 6,500 Marines at Al Mishab, Saudi Arabia, just south of the Kuwait-Iraq border.

COMPHIBGRU THREE has participated in numerous humanitarian assistance operations, including typhoon relief in Bangladesh, evacuation efforts during the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, assistance in East Timor, oil recovery efforts in Prince William Sound and earthquake relief in San Francisco. COMPHIBGRU THREE also assisted in the recovery efforts of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 that went down off the Southern California Coast near Port Hueneme in January, 2000.

In October 1992, COMPHIBGRU THREE became the primary planning agency for amphibious fleet exercises and pre-deployment training for Commander, THIRD Fleet.

The command deployed December 1992 for Operation RESTORE HOPE. As Commander, Amphibious Task Force and Maritime Prepositioning Force - based at the Mogadishu Port Facility - COMPHIBGRU THREE established base camps and perimeter defense for U.S. and United Nations Forces in Somalia. CPG3 deployed in January 1994 for Operation CONTINUE HOPE and again in January 1995 in the role of Commander, Naval Forces, Operation UNITED SHIELD, the final withdraw of U.N. forces from Somalia.

Reorganized in April 1995, COMPHIBGRU THREE assumed the material readiness mission formerly assigned to the recently disestablished Amphibious Squadrons SEVEN and NINE, and began reporting directly to Commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Also in 1995, COMPHIBGRU THREE ships participated in Exercise Cooperation from the Sea, a rare opportunity to train with the Russian Federation Navy and Naval Infantry Forces in a humanitarian mission scenario. The exercise coincided with ceremonies in Pearl Harbor commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II.

In 1996, COMPHIBGRU THREE ships participated in exercises with Jordanian forces and embarked landing craft from the United Arab Emirates for the first time in U.S. Navy history.

The command deployed in the role of Commander, Maritime Prepositioning Force in MONTH, 1998 for Exercise Native Fury in Kuwait, and Exercise Freedom Banner in Korea. In 2000, the command deployed in this role in support of Exercise Natural Fire in Mombasa, Kenya.

In October 1998, the command absorbed Naval Inshore Undersea Warfare Group ONE and redesignated Naval Coastal Warfare Group ONE. In 2001, COMPHIBGRU THREE assets participated in the large-scale amphibious operation exercise, Kernel Blitz, at Camp Pendleton. Also in 2001, the command participated in Turbo Cads 01, a joint logistics over-the-shore exercise in South Korea.

The primary focus of effort for 2003 was providing expeditionary Maritime Prepositioning Forces and Amphibious forces in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. COMPHIBGRU THREE provided the forces and stood up as Commander Task Force 51 to execute a multitude of the Naval Component Commander's assigned missions. Task Force 51 was responsible for the eight-ship Amphibious Task Force East and 7-ship Amphibious Task Force West, one Amphibious Ready Group and all Coalition amphibious assets in the Commander FIFTH Fleet AOR. CPG-3, along with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), deployed onboard Tarawa in January 2003. Tarawa returned in July 2003.

In addition to the deployments in support of OIF, CPG-3 also deployed the first expeditionary strike group, Expeditionary Strike Group One, onboard USS Peleliu (LHA

5) in August 2003. ESG 1 operated in direct support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. ESG 1 didn't return from OEF an OIF until March 2004.

The strike group is a relatively new concept that recasts the traditional amphibious ready group into a more powerful, more agile force capable of a wide range of missions that U.S. forces might be called on to perform.

Operation Iraqi Freedom Two (OIF II), the swap-out of the Army's First Infantry soldiers with Marines from the First Marine Expeditionary Force in January and February, included a host of amphibious and maritime ships and was conceived and initiated nearly six months before the operation was executed.

To support the OIF II Force Rotation Plan and the First Marine Expeditionary Force's deployment to relieve the Third Air Cavalry Regiment and the 82nd Airborne in Iraq, Commander Amphibious Group Three, Rear Adm. W. C. Marsh, and his San Diego-based staff deployed into the Fifth Fleet Area of Operations. Marsh assumed duties as Commander Task Force 51 (CTF 51) and began overseeing amphibious operations in the area.

CTF51's command of two expeditionary units provided the build-up and sustainment of a 4,500-person expeditionary base camp in Kuwait Naval Base, Kuwait to support the offload of two MPF squadrons and more than 100 Military Sealift ships while supporting the Joint Logistics Over the Shore mission during build-up and sustainment phases of the operation. CTF51 forces commenced the MPF offload on 15 January and completed the full two squadrons worth of MAGTF gear and equipment within 18 days.

COMPHIBGRU Three also participated in many exercises in 2003. In January 2003, CPG-3 participated in Transparent Hunter 03, a mine clearance exercise. This included Naval Special Clearance Team One (NSCT-1) as part of the mammal mine clearance exercise. CPG-3 also participated in the Alaskan Joint Operation in March 2003. COMPHIBGRU Three participated as part of the force protection exercise during this joint operation.

Again in January 2004, CPG3 deployed USS Boxer (LHD 4) in support of OIF II. Boxer was tasked to transport U.S. Marine Corps assets, including helicopters, equipment and maintenance personnel, to Kuwait.

Also, in May 2004, COMPHIBGRU Three deployed Expeditionary Strike Group Five (ESG 5 ) in support of the Global War on Terrorism. ESG 5 is the first expeditionary strike group to deploy under the command of a Marine Corps general. ESG 5 , deploying under the Marine Corps flag, allows this strike group to be a "911 force" for areas with known terrorist activity including the Persian Gulf. Expeditionary Strike Group Three is expected to return in December 2004.